

Text: John 20:1-2

Theme: CAN YOU SEE THE LIGHT?

1. Darkness
2. Dawn
3. Daylight

Early on the first day of the week, while it was still dark, Mary Magdalene went to the tomb and saw that the stone had been removed from the entrance. So she came running to Simon Peter and the other disciple, the one Jesus loved, and said, "They have taken the Lord out of the tomb, and we don't know where they have put him!"

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

The road, on one of my trips for the Michigan District Home Mission Board, took me through the mountains of West Virginia. One of the tunnels we entered was over a mile long. What a feeling, almost scary, to leave the bright sun behind and enter that dimly lit, seemingly endless tunnel. How our eyes almost longed for the first glimmer of light as we neared the exit. And how our spirits lifted as we drove out again into the beautiful, warm sunshine.

DARKNESS

Mary came to Jesus' tomb early, "**While it was still dark,**" John writes. And those words describe the condition of her heart too. Anyone who has lost a loved one knows something about how she felt—the loss, the despair, the grief over one who is gone, never to return again.

But Mary's darkness went much deeper. Remember her past months. She had been cured by Jesus when he had cast seven devils out of her. From then on she had followed him, serving him with full devotion and a heart full of faith in him as the promised Savior. Then had come Good Friday. Not only was the sky over Calvary pitch black as she stood beneath Christ's cross, so was her heart. Not only was the tomb into which they hurriedly deposited his lifeless clay devoid of light, so was her spirit. Not only was Jesus dead, so were her hopes that he was the one who would redeem Israel. Now, even his body was gone, the last remnant she had of him, carried off by who knows whom to who knows where. Yes, "**while it was still dark**" described not only the sky but also her soul.

Is there anyone here who knows the feeling? Anyone who's wept at a freshly filled grave or who's returned to weep again and again? Anyone who's struggling with life, getting tired of its burdens and weary of its weight? Anyone who's sins just never seem to go away and whose temptations so often seem to win? Anyone who's feeling shoved into some tunnel without any daylight in sight? Then stick around as we follow Mary Magdalene from darkness into dawn.

DAWN

Dawn comes. Every day it happens. So also that first Easter. In the early glimmer of light that day, Mary could see that the stone had been rolled away from Jesus' tomb. Just a little thinking and Mary should have known the disciples had not cracked open the master's tomb and stolen his body to spread the lie that he was risen from the dead. They were too paralyzed by fear to plan and perform such things. A little more thinking and she should have known that the enemies had nothing to do with the rolled-away stone either. In fact, that was the very thing they were trying to prevent with their round-the-clock guard and special seal. They wanted Jesus still dead in that tomb so people could start forgetting all about him and settle back to normal again. But the Easter dawn was starting. Some of her friends had continued to the tomb, even though she had turned back. And they had not only seen angels shining in glory but heard the unbelievable news that Jesus was risen from the dead.

Is there anyone here who knows that feeling? Anyone who's ever walked away from the worship service feeling good only to have life as usual dim the joy? Anyone who's seen the Easter dawning only to have pain and problem, loss and doubt like some dropping curtain shut out almost all the Easter light? Then stick around as we follow Mary Magdalene from dawn into full daylight.

DAYLIGHT

Dawn soon disappears, chased away by the sun rising in all its glory. In the dawn Mary had seen the stone rolled away and had run back to Jerusalem to report, **"They have taken the Lord out of the tomb and we don't know where they have put him."** Later in the daylight she returned to that tomb to weep and tell the angel the same story.

Then it happened. As she wept, she turned and through tear-blurred eyes noticed someone standing behind her. All doubt vanished as she heard that voice she knew so well calling out, **"Mary."** With amazing suddenness her tears were dried and the weight lifted from her heart. No more could sin's guilt hammer her; Christ had been delivered for her sins and raised again for her justification. No more could Satan bedevil her; Christ had marched into his hellish domain and dropped him flat in the dust. No more could death hold her; Christ had both entered and exited the grave to show that because he lives so would she. The tunnel of darkness was left far behind as she thrilled to the news, "My Savior lives."

Is there anyone here who knows the feeling? I hope so! The glorious light of Easter brightens our darkest day and keeps the smile of faith on our lips. Long after our graves are forgotten and the etching faded on gravestones, this Easter light will still be shining. As long as the world stands, people like Mary Magdalene will find their greatest joy in him who is the resurrection and the life. May we always be among them. Amen.

Prayer of the Church

Risen Lord, thank you for the glorious light of Easter. Help us live each day in its light. When the sins and troubles of life threaten to plunge us into darkness, help us see you standing at the end of the tunnel. Keep our faith strong till in heaven we see you face-to-face, as Mary Magdalene did that first Easter.

Lord of love, we celebrate this day the love that Gib and Marcie Sturm share as husband and wife. Bless their 45th wedding anniversary day, and bless the bond that they have with one another. Let their love continue to grow. Let their hearts be filled with gladness and gratitude for the gift of marriage. And let their lives express their deep appreciation for your great love for them.

Dear Jesus, the great Physician of body and soul, we pray for Brian Abraham, Cindy Hadd, Dick Lambert, and Rick Schoof, who are seriously ill. If it is your will, we ask you to heal and strengthen them. Keep them strong in the saving faith you have given them. Even as we pray for them, most precious Lord, we lift our hearts in behalf of their loved ones. Be with them and uphold them through the dark hours of their watching and waiting, and keep them, also, with your saving strength. Let them see the daylight of your grace and love.

We ask all this in your name, dear Jesus, who taught us to pray:

THE LORD'S PRAYER in today's language